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MALES ARE ALL ALIKE; WHETHER
BIRDS OR HUMANS, THEY STRUT

A comparison of the courtship technique of the game birds in a new leaflet entitled "Game Birds of Maine" according to officials of the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of the Interior, shows that all the males like to strut.

"Game Birds in Maine" is a brief, nontechnical discussion of some of the Pine State's more important game birds. It discusses courtship, nesting, food habits, mortality, and the management of eleven game birds. Written by Clarence M. Aldous, of the Biological Survey, and H. L. Mendall, instructor in game management at the University of Maine, the work is based on observations conducted by the Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. Copies are available to the public by writing to the Extension Service, University of Maine, or the Maine Commission of Inland Fisheries and Game, Augusta, Maine.

A comparison of the courtship of various species of birds discloses the fact that though the technique differs somewhat, the end result is the same: The male does his best to impress the female with his beauty and importance.

There's a reason for the strutting, however. The males, almost without exception, have feathers of gaudy colors, while the females are usually of drab hue.

Ruffed grouse, for example, breed late in winter or early in spring. The male usually places himself on an old tree trunk and proceeds to make a noise

resembling that of an old-fashioned engine being started in the distance. This sound is called "drumming" and was thought to have been produced by the wings beating on the sides of the body or the log. Motion pictures, however, show that the bird makes the sound by fanning the air.

The Canada spruce grouse and the ring-necked pheasant are definitely strutters. The grouse struts about with his red eye partly distended, the breast feathers fluffed, the wings lowered, and the tail spread and raised. He, too, resorts to drumming, but the sound is more subdued than that made by the ruffed grouse and it is usually produced while in flight. Instead of drumming, the pheasant cackles.

The woodcock and the Wilson's snipe might be termed "show-offs." The woodcock goes to the singing grounds in the evenings where he utters a series of nasal, buzzing notes. Then he rises swiftly into the air giving a characteristic whistle produced both by wings and vocal means. After circling in the air from 100 to 300 feet about the singing ground, he suddenly plummets to earth in a graceful series of zig-zag movements and returns to the spot from which he took off. He immediately repeats the performance.

A male Wilson's snipe likewise performs by gliding back to the take-off point, but this bird embellishes his routine by breaking the flight with slight downward dips. A snipe may sustain the series of dipping and soaring for as long as an hour at a time.

More boisterous are the waterfowl. The black duck courtship takes place both in the air and on the water. The male pursues the prospective mate in the air and suddenly drops into the water, where he splashes and swims about while carrying on vigorous quackings.

Similar to the antics of the Black duck are those of the male blue-winged teal and wood duck.

In common with most waterfowl, the bufflehead confines its courting to water activities. The male displays his feathers, swims, dives, and makes brief circles around its prospective mate. At the same time it attempts to intimidate other males in the vicinity. The American goldeneye and the ring-necked duck are like the bufflehead, except that sometimes a goldeneye male leaps out of the water in what apparently is its eagerness to perform before the female.

The leaflet does not state what the females think about the "show-off" males.

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